

## GENERAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Report to Chief Academic Officers

January 30, 2006

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As an outgrowth of ongoing discussions about General Education in Kentucky postsecondary education, the Council of Chief Academic Officers named a task force to address General Education issues in the Commonwealth. Jim Applegate, CPE Vice President for Academic Affairs conveyed this charge to the Task Force:

The CCAO appointed workgroup will research best practices on improving liberal/general education for Kentucky students, develop draft plans for a Kentucky initiative, and report back to the CCAO for review and discussion of the report this fall. The group will explore a foundation for general education upon which diverse models of a liberal arts curriculum across Kentucky institutions can be established that provide students the core competencies that all students need to be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society. The report will address the need to move from (or supplement) a transfer framework based on courses and credits which restricts innovation to one based on competencies and correlated assessments that support and encourage innovation.

While working toward an innovative and supple General Education curriculum that prepares all Kentucky students for life in a new century, the Task Force believes that successful strategies for change in General Education must also allow for the distinctiveness of the Commonwealth's different institutions. The Task Force also believes that the most effective strategies for change will be those generated by the collaborative efforts of the faculty directly involved in General Education. Consequently, our plans are geared to building a state-wide environment that supports those discussions.

As a first step toward addressing its charge, the Task Force identified two immediate goals to pursue over the next three academic years.

- **Identify, develop and communicate best practices that increase the value, coherence, and intentionality of the General Education curricula.**

The national dialog focused on improving General Education, including the AAC& U and The Pew Charitable Trust initiatives, is creating interest in

restructuring instructional strategies in postsecondary education. For meaningful change to occur in Kentucky, faculty and administrators need opportunities to explore how the national agenda is reshaping General Education instruction, and what we can learn from the research and best practice in other states. Creating opportunities for state-wide discussions provides the foundation for any action related to building greater intentionality.

- **Determine the General Education (student) learning outcomes and assessment methodologies that lead to improved practices, enhanced transferability, and augmented accountability.**

While faculty members have considerable opportunity to meet and discuss the substance of their disciplines, post-secondary education provides relatively little opportunity for sharing ideas about interdisciplinary programs such as General Education. An important step toward change in General Education is to create forums for faculty and administrators to focus on General Education in the same way they focus on other broad issues in post-secondary education. Central to accomplishing this goal is the need to establish a working model to determine whether or not, and how discipline-based workgroups might be empowered to discuss and determine the General Education competencies within a single discipline.

### **Action Plan**

With these goals in mind, the Task Force proposes the implementation of a specific action plan over the next three academic years.

#### **Spring 2006**

During the spring of 2006, the General Education Taskforce will initiate the following Action Steps to facilitate dialog and greater collaboration.

- **Seek Funding for Academic Innovation**  
Submit a proposal to CPE for an *Academic Innovation Grants* to support collaborative projects in General Education competency and assessment development.
- **Establish A Model Discipline-Based Workgroup to Draft Student Learning Outcomes**  
Representatives from departments of mathematics representing each public institutions in Kentucky are selected to meet (face-to-face, electronically, and through video conferencing), discuss, and determine the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes that constitute the education goals for General Education, college-level mathematics. The mathematics professors in Kentucky have already initiated similar discussions during 2005 when they worked on the statewide committee for mathematics achievement. This model discipline-based workgroup

will provide valuable information related to proof of concept. If successful, the mathematics workgroup will become the model for future discipline-based efforts. If unsuccessful, the model workgroup will provide insights into how to best proceed. The ultimate goal is to create a list of the agreed upon learning goals and outcomes to assist institutions to achieve enhanced intentionality, and smoother articulation and alignment.

- **Creating a Moderated List Serve to share information on General Education**

A moderated list serve would give faculty members a means of sharing information and posting questions on a regular basis. Such a list serve would need to be hosted by one of the institutions, and the list of initial participants would need to be developed.

- **Create a General Education Thread in conjunction with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Conference in May 2006.**

The CPE sponsored Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is a successful and well-established forum for faculty members to discuss instructional issues. The conference provides an appropriate venue to enhance conversations on topics related to General Education across the Commonwealth. We propose that the May 2006 conference include a “thread” on General Education, including the following possible topics:

1. *Discussion Session*: “What knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes will our graduates need to acquire in college to be successful and productive citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?”
2. *Presentations*: “Overcoming Challenges to Effective Teaching in General Education Classes.”
3. *Discussion Session*: “What might we do on our own campuses to improve the effectiveness of General Education?”

- **Pursue Funding for a General Education Summit in 2007**

## **2006-07**

- **Collect and disseminate information about the best practices in General Education**

The momentum for change in General Education is creating new ideas about organizational frameworks for General Education, new curriculum models, and a considerable body of pertinent literature. Utilizing the moderated list-serve, collect and categorize the literature to make it more readily available to faculty members.

- **Conduct an Environmental Scan**

For many baccalaureate students, the General Education component is roughly a third of their curriculum. It plays a crucial role in the ability of our students to be

successful in their careers or in further study. We need to know more about what our constituents—business, the professions, communities, graduate and professional schools—think our students need to be successful in reaching their goals. We would also like to know more about what students think they will need to be successful in the future. We recommend hiring someone to conduct focus groups and develop questionnaires designed to elicit this information from these groups. We also recommend that the survey include student government associations at Kentucky’s colleges and universities.

- **Convene a General Education Summit (Winter 2007)**

Kentucky has devoted state-wide meetings to major post-secondary issues such as faculty development and teacher quality, and General Education is a topic of similar significance. A state-wide meeting would bring together interested faculty, staff, and administrators and provide a vehicle for sharing and developing new ideas. The meeting should include national leaders in General Education including a prominent keynote speaker. Themes to be addressed as part of the summit would include

1. Assessment of General Education
2. Student Engagement and General Education
3. Effective Teaching and Learning in General Education Courses
4. Innovative Approaches to General Education
5. Results of the Environmental Scan

***Share results of the work of the 2006 Mathematics Workgroups.*** The Summit will provide an opportunity for the Discipline Workgroup to share its progress with educational constituents.

***Round Table Discussion.*** The 2007 Summit should include a *Round Table Discussion* with Chief Academic Officers on “Challenges to Creating an Exciting and Effective GE Curriculum.” The Task Force believes that the active and informed involvement of senior academic leadership is crucial to improving General Education.

- **Determine the Feasibility of Developing Additional *Discipline-Based Workgroups* to Draft Educational Goals**

## **Budget**

The Task Force proposes the following budget to support the Action Plan we have developed.

### **2006-2007**

General Education Summit (assumes attendance of 250)		<b>\$85,000</b>
Room costs for attendees (\$150/person)	\$37,500	
Food costs (\$70/person)	\$17,500	
Incidentals (\$40/person)	\$10,000	
Speakers	\$20,000	
Academic Innovation Grants		<b>100,000*</b>
Discipline-based discussions of Gen Ed competencies		<b><u>\$15,000</u></b>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>

### **2007-2008**

Discipline-based workgroups to establish competencies		<b>\$15,000</b>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$15,000</b>

*\* Funds distributed after RFP*

**2006-2007 TOTAL: \$215,000**

## **Conclusion**

General Education is central to the undergraduate experience and the changes sweeping postsecondary education demand a fresh perspective on this core element of the curriculum. For the good of its students and the health of the Commonwealth, Kentucky needs to be in the forefront of this important education initiative. The Task Force proposes a budget and a plan that will provide information as well as incentives to act on that information in bringing innovation to Kentucky's colleges and universities.